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# Editorial

## 'A very horrid thing'?

Most agree that the roots of the charismatic movement go back to the holiness and Wesleyan traditions—traditions which have deeply affected evangelicalism without ever receiving the whole-hearted approval of Anglican evangelicals, much less of the wider Church of England. Such movements have always been suspect because of their emotionalism; because of reservations about their sense of a direct immediate access to God which provides a short-cut through the more rational and hardly bought knowledge of those for whom guidance involves a close attention to the traditions of the past; and because of their innate anticlericalism and anti-institutionalism. Much of the criticism has been fair, and it has always been easy to find targets amongst the unbalanced extremists who are inevitably attracted. Yet to look historically at movements of enthusiasm—and their lineage goes back very far—is to get the uncomfortable sense that, however much they may have gone over the top, their critique did expose legitimate weakness, and that failure to comprehend what they said and, perhaps more important, what they represented, was to the spiritual detriment of their opponents.

Typically they protested against formalism; against an over-dominance of church structures by a few professionals (priests, ministers or theologians); against a failure to emphasize the priesthood of all believers; against a mode of worship which, however beautiful, did not do justice to their sense of joyful immediacy, spontaneity and warmth. Because the church has often met them harshly and without comprehension, and because they have held their views with more absolute certainty than outgoing love and tolerance, there has frequently been conflict. Luther's bitter castigation of the *schwärmer* is well known, as is the unhappiness of many of the authorities of the Church of England with the enthusiasm of Wesley and Whitefield. Such examples do not provide grounds for optimism about the reaction to similar movements in the church today. Reading the November General Synod debate on the charismatic movement brings echoes from the past. To quote Bishop Butler's judgement that 'the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing—a very horrid thing!' (*The Journal of John Wesley* [Standard Ed.], Vol.2, p.257) is generally good for a laugh, but Bishop Wickham's categorization, without significant qualification, of the charismatic movement as part of the subrational and irrational movements of the age (General Synod, *Report of Proceedings*, Vol.12, November 1981, pp.1135–7) is

perhaps equally, though not so memorably wide of the mark.

Bishop Wickham's claim that the Church of England is 'the most rational splinter of Christendom' (ibid. p.1137) would have rejoiced the heart of Butler but not of Wesley. Wesley saw clearly the weakness of such an apologetic: 'Only men of a strong and clear understanding can be sensible of its full force' (*The Letters of John Wesley* [Standard Ed.], Vol.2, p.384.) It gave the impression that commitment to Christ was a matter of the head only, and this impression was reinforced by the 'stately masked-ball' (Colin Buchanan's phrase, *Proceedings*, op.cit., p.1130) formality of Anglican worship. Eighteenth-century Anglicanism simply did not make any contact with large sections of the population. Methodism made Christianity come alive in a way that was vulgar, noisy and enthusiastic and, therefore, at once meaningful to many who could not find significance in the rational formality of Anglican religion, and obnoxious to those who found both their religious susceptibilities and their social mores challenged. The tragedy was that division ensued, and the established church lost enthusiasm, energy and an ability to communicate with a whole social segment; while the Methodists were deprived of the genuine wisdom and balance acquired through the centuries.

Nobody would suggest that history is exactly repeating itself to-day. There is much more acceptance of the charismatic movement within the institutional churches than there was of the Anabaptists or of the Methodists. Such dissimilarities should not make one over-sanguine. House church separations are signs of disturbing fissures. More importantly there are similarities of context and style between spiritual movements in this century and those which caused division in earlier centuries, which should cause the church to be alert to the potential for schism.

First, the context of such movements has generally been social dislocation and dissatisfaction. It was no accident that Thomas Müntzer became involved in the Peasants' Revolt, or that Wesleyanism found a particular attraction for those in the mill towns and mines created by the demands of the industrial revolution. It is significant, too, how so often movements of religious protest, particularly in their early stages, give a role to women, subconsciously aware of the tensions between their theoretical equality in Christ and their actual subordination in the institutional church. In such a context, hallowed traditions are questioned; once-revered leaders are doubted; and new, uncertain and disturbing horizons, at one and the same time, arouse expectations and increase insecurities. So the present becomes difficult, the past irrelevant, and the future both exciting and terrifying.

Secondly, the aspirations of such movements have been for a role and identity for ordinary Christians denied them in the complex hierarchy of orthodoxy. Clasen notes how the Anabaptists rejected the contemporary church culture for a very simple worship style, and thus

'filled a need for an intimate, emotional expression of piety that the official churches of the sixteenth century failed to recognize' (Clause-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618*, Cornell U P, Ithaca, 1972, p.95).

Thirdly, the reaction of the ecclesiastical institutions which felt threatened has often been to underline the institutionalism, which was, in itself, so objectionable. They perhaps felt the necessity to do so because they were having to cope with the same tensions and changes, and they found the movement of enthusiasm within their folds a further and major irritant. So Montanism was a decisive factor in hardening the ministerial structures of the early church. Therefore it might be felt that a church with the propensity towards the rather insensitive centralization and bureaucracy of the last twentieth-century Church of England, could easily be particularly threatened.

Fourthly, the movements themselves react to any frustration of their objectives by splitting away from their mother church. They follow a host of strong charismatic personalities, sometimes deeply divided amongst themselves. Such leaders are not infrequently in dire danger of heresy: partly because they have no knowledge of, or desire to acquaint themselves with, the post-biblical Christian heritage; and partly because their own personalities loom larger than the Scripture under which they would claim to stand, or the body of believers to which they would claim to be responsible. The multifarious divisions of Anabaptism were not quite reflected within Methodism because of the forceful organizational genius of Wesley, but, even there, there were sufficient separations to make it obvious that the phenomenon had many similarities.

In its attitude, the Church of England is divided. The critical and negative reaction of the November General Synod debate has been balanced by the much more positive and constructive February debate. That debate was fully aware of the dangers of driving the charismatic movement to the fringes where, as Bishop Montefiore prophesied, 'it is bound to generate crankiness and fanaticism, excesses and abuse' (*Proceedings*, Vol.13, February 1982, p.86). It should be a matter of prayerful concern, as the report before Synod (General Synod, *The Charismatic Movement in the Church of England*, CIO, London 1981) is debated in the dioceses and the churches, and as its doctrinal implications are pondered by the Doctrine Commission, that past divisions are avoided, that relevant criticism is heard on both sides, and that spirituality and the ability to communicate a living gospel are enhanced.

PETER WILLIAMS

## Editorial Board

We should like to welcome the following new members of the Editorial Board who have joined us during 1982: The Rev. Dr David Atkinson, the Rev. Dr Gerald Bray, the Rev. Christopher Lamb, the Rev. Stephen Motyer, the Rev. Dr Michael Sansom and the Rev. Peter Southwell.

At the same time we say goodbye to those members who have left us in recent months and extend our grateful thanks to them for their help and encouragement: The Rev. Don Irving, Prof. Alan Rogers and the Rev. Prof. Douglas Spanner.

## Letter to the editor

from the chairman of Church Society

Dear Sir,

Some members of Church Society Council are concerned at views put forward by Dr James Dunn in the first part of his article in the Society's theological journal (1982:2). They do not feel that it expresses a balanced evangelical position.

Yours faithfully,

John F. D. Pearce

### and the general editor replies:

One sympathizes greatly with the concern of any who feel uneasy about particular opinions expressed in *Churchman*. It is, however, important to realize two points:

1) The paper was first given at the Consultation of Anglican Evangelicals in 1981. It was presumably commissioned by the Committee which organized that Consultation as an attempt to gain further clarification in an important area of debate in a way which would be helpful to the thinking evangelical constituency. In the event its conclusions, while not accepted by many, led it seems to a mature, creative and irenic debate.

2) *Churchman* does not aim to reflect in every article a balanced evangelical position. Rather it aims to reflect a reasonably even variety of positions which obtain within evangelicalism on many issues. Some articles will be definitive, some will be entirely 'sound', others will be exploratory and may challenge received traditions, while yet others will seek to defend the traditions from attack. Dr Dunn's article comes in the exploratory and challenging category. It involves a vigorous critique of a standard evangelical position but from, Dr Dunn would

argue, a commitment to an understanding of the authority of Scripture which is entirely evangelical. It is wholly understandable that such an exercise rouses equally vigorous disagreement. The debate existed before the article. It is to be hoped that the article will assist clarification within the debate, and it is important to assure any who might feel that some 'tendency' or another was becoming dominant in *Churchman* that the Editorial Board are committed to reflecting major views within this, as in all other, debates, and to this end are actively engaged in commissioning work on this subject from very different perspectives.

PETER WILLIAMS

## **Newbold College, Bracknell**

We thank readers very much indeed for their reponse to the request for certain back issues of *Churchman* for the college library.

### **George Colliss Boardman Davies 1912–1982**

Canon Emeritus of Worcester Cathedral

By the death of Colliss Davies, the Church of England has lost an able scholar, and the evangelicals one of their most distinguished church historians. Son of George Davies, sometime archdeacon of Nagpur, after schooling at Monkton Combe under Hayward, and a relatively successful academic course as a member of St Catherine's College, Cambridge, he served as curate at Woking with Canon Askwith. From a brief incumbency of a family-living at Norwich, he moved to a country parish on the borders of Devon and Cornwall, and while rector of North Tamerton carried out researches which led to his *Early Cornish Evangelicals*. This useful and substantially pioneer study of men like Walker of Truro—to whom he had been introduced by the lectures of his principal, Dr T. W. Gilbert, when studying for ordination at St John's Hall, Highbury—earned him his BD.

By the time Davies moved to the rectory of Kingham in North Oxfordshire in 1951, work instigated by Professor Norman Sykes on a biography of a renowned opponent of evangelicalism, Henry Phillpotts, bishop of Exeter, was far advanced. In the same year he married Mai Maitland-Kirwan, who gave him loving support for the rest of his life. By virtue of his impartial study of 'Henry of Exeter', published in 1954, Davies proceeded DD, a distinction then, as now, rare among latter-day evangelicals, as indeed among the parish clergy as a whole. Thus in 1956 he was ready to take up the Beresford professorship of

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ecclesiastical history at Trinity College, Dublin, where he taught for seven years, acting during part of that time as professor of pastoral theology. In 1962 he became treasurer of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, but in the following year exchanged his Irish responsibilities for a residentiary canonry of Worcester. At the same time was published his valuable centenary history of St John's, Highbury, entitled *Men for the Ministry*.

Like other committed evangelicals, Davies found participation in contemporary cathedral work was not invariably congenial, although he enjoyed acting as chapter librarian. From 1971 to 1975 he exercised additional influence as diocesan director of post-ordination studies and examining chaplain to the bishop of Worcester. Serious heart trouble impaired his last years in office; but by the time he retired to Oxford in 1977 he was ready to take over some church history teaching at Wycliffe Hall from the present writer. Always keen to help, particularly those with similar research interests, his main academic concern remained with the history of the evangelicals, whose convictions, as incidentally shown by his contributions to this journal, he rejoiced to share. Moderate, however, in expressing his own views, and with a sardonic sense of humour, he enjoyed good relations with proponents of all schools of thought. He will be missed by his various friends, by his old pupils, and above all by his family.

Dry Sandford Rectory, Oxon

JOHN REYNOLDS